A plan in hand

Richard Roberts, 3 July 2013

FOR shift planning, simple wins, according to Fewzion's Paul Moynagh. A few simple sums point to the huge potential for the small company's innovative software too.

"We're targeting 200 installs in the next four years," Moynagh told ***HighGrade***.

"There are 44 underground coal mines in Australia; around 150 underground mines in total in Australia, and I estimate about 800 underground coal mines around the world. The potential market goes to over 10,000 when you start counting opencut and hard rock mines globally."

The concept for the Fewzion product emerged two years ago from work at a Queensland longwall coal mine which was striving for productivity improvements.

"Early in the program they decided that the planning spreadsheets and whiteboards that were limping along in the mine – and nearly every other mine they knew – were simply not up to the task," said Moynagh, a Fewzion founding director. "They wasted a lot of people's time, time that was better spent underground, they were hard to manage, the macros broke all the time and it was impossible to see what other planners were planning or even whether the plan was getting done."

The answer was to get rid of the shift planning, roster, equipment and KPI spreadsheets and replace them with a purpose built, online shift planning system that was able to slot straight into the way the operator wanted to run the mine. Fewzion also replaced the visual end of shift whiteboards and run charts with an easy-to-use touchscreen for entering KPIs and closing out planned tasks.

Anglo American and Peabody Coal are two big international miners now using Fewzion. The Australian company says one mine that had been using Fewzion for more than 18 months was "the best performing underground mine in the group and one of the best in Australia".

"We estimate that Fewzion has delivered a 10% improvement in operating time and production over the period they have been using the system," the software developer claims.

Moynagh told ***HighGrade*** Fewzion's development focused on putting a plan in the hand of the person who was "going to make it happen each shift" and holding them accountable for getting it done.

"Everyone else is still using spreadsheets and whiteboards for this," he said.

"We wanted to give people a simple, fused view of the work that needs to happen each shift [hence the name].

"The thing everyone mentions is how simple it is to use and that it is easy to set up and doesn't cost a lot. It works through a browser and can be set up either in the cloud or on your servers. If you run it in the cloud you could get updates and change your plan for the weekend from your boat.

"People who can't use computers can still use Fewzion – it's iPad simple," Moynagh said.

"In just two hours training coordinators, schedulers, planners and under-managers can be set up and ready to create and manage weekly plans and schedules. We seldom get any push back on the system

because it just makes planning so much easier than the spreadsheets and whiteboards people are used to."

Moynagh said Fewzion's initial focus was on underground mines because that's what the first system was designed for.

"We have interest from a few opencut pits and are thinking through how to make it work for them. We may collaborate with one of the dispatch systems to make this happen," he said.

The Fewzion product was being reviewed by "three of the top 10 global mining firms".

"Our current clients are keen to push us out to their international cousins and we are working on collaborating with IT services and/or other mining software firms to help miners around the world simplify the way they run their operation."

Moynagh said the core technical team behind Fewzion had been together for 12 years building software for mines and other industries.

"We are a small team but we're working with a major IT services company to help us scale up and tick the right boxes for big organisations," he said.

Dr Jeremy Davis, director of the Natural Resources Centre of Excellence at Computer Sciences Corporation in Australia, said the company was working with Fewzion to make its product available to CSC clients.

"In our experience designing, building and implementing mining operation systems we have frequently identified a gap where the tasks, KPIs, mining crews and their associated equipment are managed each shift," Davis said. "Long-term planning and project tools are well established but this day to day, hour to hour management of the operation is much more challenging because of the inevitable, frequent unplanned changes and constraints.

"Fewzion fills this gap in the operational system landscape and seems to be the only system that does. We have been impressed with its capability and the performance improvements Fewzion have helped their clients make. I like their hands-on, crew-focused approach and their attention to detail in particular with respect to ease of use.

"CSC is always on the lookout for innovative systems that can help miners improve their performance and we have the people and infrastructure to help our tier one clients use these technologies safely and effectively."

And simply.

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